

SECRET

Executive Registry

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ROBERT G. NEUMANN
U. S. AMBASSADOR (RET.)

July 20, 1983

STAT

Honorable William Clark
Adviser to the President for
National Security Affairs
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Bill,

I. The postponement of Prime Minister Begin's visit gives us an opportunity to regain the initiative in our Middle East policy and to fold our Lebanon policy into a broader Middle East strategy. We may not have this opportunity later on when further crises confront us.

II. I do not suggest leaning on Israel at this time. This is ineffective, even counterproductive, unless we do so to obtain specific targets. That is not the case now. What I do suggest, with regard to our relations with both Israel and the Arabs, is that we establish our policy. I say that because I note with dismay that the period of illusions has not ended. I detect a tendency, for instance, to blame our misfortunes on the Syrians. That is humanly understandable, but pitiful. Of course the Syrians have done us in, but the business of sound diplomacy is not to place oneself in a situation where one's opponents can do one dirt. I have often criticized the Arabs for blaming others for the consequences of their incompetence. I hate to see us fall into the same trap.

This is what, in my opinion, we should do:

(a) Seek an opportunity for the President to reiterate in clear, firm, unaccusing fashion the principles of his September 1, 1982 speech as the only road to peace. This declaration should make reference to the Golan Heights as included in his (the President's) "territory for peace" formula. The purpose would be to stop the present drift, stake out our policy, create momentum, affirm Presidential leadership, set a tone of calm, sovereign policy direction befitting a great and sovereign power.

(b) Stress our commitment to the evacuation of Lebanon by all foreign forces, but make a low-key yet unmistakable distinction between the Israeli and Syrian status in Lebanon, without attacking either.

(c) I have said and written to you before that we have no capacity to stop Israel from undertaking a partial withdrawal. That is now water under the dam. But I reiterate that we should cooperate with such a move as little as possible, unless the Israelis were to set a timetable for total withdrawal - of which I see no sign. If the Israelis want to increase security in the evacuated region, it is for them, not us, to approach the UN (UNIFIL) or the French MNF if the latter is willing. If the Lebanese want help in that area, we should

State Dept. review completed

SECRET

SECRET

- 2 -

give it to the extent possible but under no circumstances should we send our Marines there, especially not into the Shouf mountain killing ground. If we suffer casualties in a cause not clearly related to U.S. national interests, Congressional and public opposition will haunt us, not only in Lebanon but elsewhere, including Central America where we are engaged in a vital operation. Incidentally, we should press the Lebanese government, if we have not done so already, to remove the Phalange forces confronting the Druzes.

(d) We should downplay the Israeli side-letter by which they tied their withdrawal to that of the Syrians, treating it as a non-event as far as possible.

(e) Open a dialogue with Assad through an important knowledgeable but unofficial American visitor, a private citizen asked by the President to tour the area, probe, analyze, and report confidentially. We might get a better idea what Assad's intentions are, but the visitor would have no mandate to negotiate. Obviously, Secretary Shultz should not be subjected any time soon to the almost certain humiliation of another trip, and lesser officials cut no ice in Damascus. Hence, my suggestion of going out of channels.

Frankly, I do not expect any favorable action out of Assad in the near term. He has everything he wants for the time being and no motivation to be helpful. Nor do his Russian friends. However, the kind of contact suggested might add to our insight, keep up momentum or at least give an image of momentum, and give some belated attention to Syria. Also the other Arabs, who are patently afraid of Syria, would be reassured if we paid it some attention. An "unofficial" visit may be of minimal or marginal importance but is possibly the best thing we could do, with no real risk involved. The "working group" cannot function in this manner and would not have direct contact with Assad who alone counts. If the unofficial visitor produces something which could be followed up officially, the "working group" could initially serve as that channel.

(f) We should also, perhaps through the unofficial channel suggested above, probe what insight of Syrian strategy might be gained in Saudi Arabia, notably from Crown Prince Abdullah who is in charge of the "Syrian connection". At the same time we should cease holding the unrealistic expectation (and subsequent disappointment) of more forceful Saudi intervention with Syria or anybody. Several US administrations have indulged in such wishful thinking.

(g) Restore a dialogue with King Hussein. He will not come forward soon again, but we must not neglect him. He was as disappointed in USG failure to press the September 1 initiative as the USG was in his caution. Fault-finding will not help -- there is plenty of fault on both sides. We should not make the "Syrian mistake" -- neglect with regard to Jordan.

(h) Probe carefully and very discreetly what more the Iraqis can do to project future negotiations with Israel -- but we should be careful not to arouse the Syrians or cause predictable Israeli reactions.

SECRET

SECRET

- 3 -

(i) Make a greater effort to get the Egyptians to play a more active role. They are moving in the right direction, but much too slowly.

(j) Finally we should get off the dime and make a decision whether to pursue the unofficial contacts with the PLO even before, or certainly after, their status is clear, or whatever is left of them. Please bear in mind that Assad's treatment of Arafat may be or may become his only misstep in his recent regrettably brilliant maneuver. The other Arabs, including the West Bankers, are really upset about this. This is our chance to help block the Syrians by giving some encouragement to Arafat. It would also prevent our leaving the Palestinians entirely to the Soviets, the Syrians, and radicalism in general.

The PLO leadership - whatever it will turn out to be - is vulnerable. It tried the political road, collapsed in the face of radical, in large part Syrian- and Soviet-inspired, pressure, opted again for "armed struggle" in deference to its tormentors and got mugged by Assad for its trouble. The PLO should be helped to see that only a political role is feasible even if that means the inevitable split of the movement.

Bill, I would not feel impelled to make all these suggestions if I were not so concerned over the present drift, the fixation on Lebanon at the expense of broader policies, and the absence, still, of an overall strategy. The President's image as a leader, which he now exercises impressively in Central America, is encumbered by the dismal picture in the Middle East. We don't have brilliant options there, but we can take a stand and move, carefully but coolly, to a better coordinated strategy.

The next few weeks afford the President and you a respite (hopefully) to think strategy and decide which options to accept. When the President returns to Washington, his strategy should be decided upon and ready to be carried out.

Let's get going. We have lost enough time. The appearance and reality of new vigor in the execution of a Middle Eastern strategy will serve the President well.

In the hope that you may get some rest, and with warm regards,

Sincerely,



P.S. I hope you will see fit to share this with the President.

cc: G. Kemp

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